

Rotating Extension Column

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Summer Projects Keeps Work Interesting

Several horticultural activities have been planned for this growing season in Santa Rosa County. So, in addition to the day to day phone calls, office work and field visits the following projects will hopefully provide useful information for local growers.

The Apple Orchard

The “apple test orchard” is entering its third growing season. It is made up of 32 trees, with three cultivars – “Anna”, “Dorsett Golden” and “Shell”. The purpose of the orchard is to determine if it is possible to commercially grow low chill apples in the deep South and to determine how these three cultivars compare.

Since the orchard was only two years old last year, limited data was collected. It is interesting to note that many apples were produced last year in spite of my plan to remove them. I simply could not bring myself to destroy all of the fruit.

Some of the fruit was harvested in order to perform a taste test comparing the different apples produced in the orchard. Participants were 4-H members and Master Gardeners. The results from the taste panel have been filed and will be shared in the future.

This season I expect much more production even though the orchard has not yet reached its peak. More records will be kept and at some time – this summer or next, I would like to have an apple field day inviting anyone who is interested to come and see the orchard.

Stink Bug Trap Crops

Stink bugs have become some of our most difficult to control pests of fruits and vegetables. Entomologists have discovered that they respond to strategically located trap crops. These trap crops are small plots of plants specifically planted to attract stink bugs away from cash crops.

There are several trap crops that are known to attract and stop stink bugs from entering tomato fields. We did limited work with these trap crops late last summer and plan to get an earlier start this season. I will be planting strips of sorghum, pearl millet and buckwheat around tomato patches in hopes of learning more about controlling this serious pest.

Tomato Variety Trials

Tomato spotted wilt resistant varieties such as Fletcher, Bella Rosa, Quincy, Amelia, Crista and Talladega are replacing most of the older, better known but susceptible varieties. Several farms are cooperating with Extension by trying some of these new varieties and I will be monitoring the crop's progress.

Water Sensor Studies – Maybe

Instruments to monitor soil moisture are becoming more accurate and lower in price. This summer if funds are available, I plan to install sensors in several vegetable fields. These sensors will help take the guess work out of irrigation, allowing for the application of more exact amounts and frequencies. These better watering practices, if adopted, will save water and reduce the incidence of plant disease.

For more information of if you have a question, call Dan Mullins, Extension Commercial Horticulture Agent, The University of Florida/IFAS-Santa Rosa County Extension, at 850-623-3868, between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm weekdays. Hearing-impaired individuals may call Santa Rosa County Emergency Management Service at 983-5373 (TDD).

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